

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHOS #0885/01 1730557
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 220557Z JUN 06
FM AMCONSUL LAGOS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7440
RUEAHLC/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA IMMEDIATE 7445
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 1083
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE 0358
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR IMMEDIATE 0760
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS LAGOS 000885

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/FPP, CA/VO/F/P, CA/EX - JOHN O'MALLEY
DEPT ALSO PASS FAA FOR ACONLEY
DHS FOR OIA - CAROL THOMPSON
TRANSPORTATION FOR FAA
DAKAR PLEASE PASS TO FAA REP ED JONES
ROME PLEASE PASS TO TSA REP JOHN HALINSKI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KFRD CVIS ASEC EAIR NI

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR DHS PRESENCE FOR START OF NORTH
AMERICAN AIRLINES SERVICE TO NEW YORK

¶1. (U) This is an action message. See paragraph 12.

¶2. (U) The Charge d' Affaires has approved this message.

¶3. (SBU) SUMMARY. North American Airlines received final approvals to begin scheduled service on the Lagos-New York route beginning July 17. Post believes that document and identity fraud will be a major issue for these flights and requests DHS pre-flight inspection for at least the first 90 days of service. END SUMMARY.

¶4. (SBU) On May 11, North American Airways (NAA) received final approvals from the Government of Nigeria to operate non-stop service from Lagos to New York JFK beginning on July 17. NAA plans to provide service three times a week using Boeing 767 equipment.

¶5. (SBU) Post has serious concerns about vulnerabilities in U.S. border security that could result from direct air service to the United States from Nigeria. Currently, travelers wishing to visit the US from Nigeria must first transit an intermediate point, usually Europe. Each of these European flag carriers utilizes the services of document checkers and Airline Liaison Officers (ALOs) employed by their respective governments in order to reduce fraud. The UK and German governments have the biggest airline liaison programs and believe that pre-departure inspection is critical to their national security. The UK ALO told us that they deny boarding to hundreds of people each year who turn out to be imposters, holders of counterfeit documents, or are otherwise high risk travelers. They also work closely with other carriers who have questions regarding the travel documents issued by their governments.

¶6. (SBU) On May 15, the Lagos-based Country Fraud Prevention Manager met with UK ALOs and their regional Risk Assessment Manager to discuss the UK's liaison program at Murtala Mohammed International Airport (MMIA). According to the UK ALO, airlines flying to the UK deny boarding to hundreds of passengers each month, based upon their advice. They will deny boarding when they believe a document is fraudulent, the passenger is an imposter, or if they believe that the visa was improperly issued. They also use profiling

techniques to select high risk passengers for additional scrutiny. In particular, they target potential asylum seekers and possible terror threats. These checks all take place at the airport, prior to departure of the flight.

¶7. (SBU) The UK ALO office has a long memory, and recalls previous direct service to the US ex-Lagos by Nigeria Airways, Ghana Airways, and World Airways. Their view is that even with all the negative experiences faced in New York and Atlanta with previous carriers, NAA service has the potential to be more troublesome for the United States. They point to Nigeria's well documented desire for Lagos to be a regional hub, which we can already see occurring. Virgin Nigeria (VK) has quickly acted to launch numerous regional routes, and one airline industry contact has indicated that as much as 40-50% of the passenger load on some routes is connecting traffic to current VK intercontinental service to London, Johannesburg, and Dubai. This suggests that VK intercontinental service already has a broad regional appeal to Nigerian and non-Nigerian passengers alike.

¶8. (SBU) Non-stop service to the United States is expected to grow, and it is likely that there will be twenty to twenty-five flights per week to the US in the near future. Continental Airlines has been re-invited into Nigeria, and VK has expressed interest in providing service to the US. NAA plans to increase frequencies on the Lagos route to daily service once demand picks up.

¶9. (SBU) If VK or Continental Airlines also begin scheduled service to the United States, post believes pre-flight inspection will be even more critical. Regional routes that provide passenger feed to VK's intercontinental service originate in some of West Africa's most fertile ground for asylum claims. These cities include Dakar, Monrovia,

Freetown, Accra, Lome, Abidjan, Niamey, and Douala.

¶10. (SBU) Post believes that active USG participation in flight screening for the first several months of air service from Lagos will discourage large scale fraud, and will establish NAA as a "hard target". Although document and identity fraud are the main concerns, the potential for something graver certainly exists. Widespread reports indicate that Islamic militants are active in northern Nigeria, and in the southeast militant groups that may wish harm to the United States operate with a free hand. Narcotics smuggling is likely to be a major issue for this route. Without being too dramatic, we believe that in today's environment direct air service to the US, not properly monitored, represents a direct threat to the national security of the United States.

¶11. (SBU) Post has received a request from NAA contractor Swissport (operating locally as Checkport) to provide document security training to their staff. We plan to provide this training, however local document checking companies at Murtala Mohammed International Airport do not enjoy a good reputation, and KLM recently brought their document checking operation back in-house after repeated problems with the contracted staff. Consequently, we believe USG pre-flight inspection would be a necessary precursor to scheduled air links between the United States and Nigeria.

¶12. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST. In the short term, post requests TDY support from the Department of Homeland Security for the first 90 days of service ex-Lagos to the United States. We believe this support should take the form of pre-flight inspectors from Customs and Border Protection and/or Immigration and Customs Enforcement. These personnel would provide training to ground personnel and also provide consulting services regarding US bound passengers and their travel documents in a similar fashion to what the UK and German ALO programs accomplish for their respective countries. NAA has indicated that they would be supportive of this request. In the long term, post believes it is imperative for DHS to establish a permanent presence in Nigeria and requests that the Department explore the

feasibility of a new office. END ACTION REQUEST.

¶13. (U) Post point of contact for fraud and security issues related to air service from Nigeria is Lagos-based Country Fraud Prevention Manager Ryan Bowles. He can be reached at BowlesRE@state.gov and by telephone at 234-1-261-0050 x490 or GSM at 234-803-525-0992. On July 1, he will be replaced by Loren Giallanella who can be reached at GiallanellaLB@state.gov, or by telephone at the same office number.

Browne